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IN MEMORIAM.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

MRS. SUSAN E. CLARK,

AT THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, OTTAWA.

BY THE PASTOR,

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THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN.

PROV. XXXI. 10—31.

Who can find a *virtuous woman*? for her price *is* far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' shipes; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it; with the fruit of her hand she buyeth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise *is* good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hand to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hand to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honor *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

THIS charming picture of a faithful wife and mother is the more remarkable, as having been drawn in an age in which woman held a less prominent place in society, and when the highest example on the throne was far from being that of a virtuous character. Indeed, the rarity of such a character in that age of the world, is indicated ere the pen of inspiration proceeds to delineate it. The picture is undoubtedly drawn as a beautiful model for female piety, and to teach the world the true value of such a character, which God himself is pleased to commend, as the highest and most excellent in woman. *Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.* Such characters are not found in the ordinary development of nature, standing side by side with the Desdemonas of fiction, or with the noble Cornelias of Roman fame. They have their nurturing the rather amid the genial influences of a holy religion, and are among the most beautiful and precious fruits of its highest culture, matured and ripened under the beams of the sun of righteousness.

In the Hebrew, the sketch here given is of the nature of a sacred poem.

It contains, in all, twenty-two verses; each verse in succession beginning with a different letter, and comprising the whole letters of the Hebrew alphabet,—an arrangement attracting to itself peculiar attention, rendering the passage pleasing to the eye and easy to be recalled to memory.

I present it to your consideration AS A BEAUTIFUL PORTRAITURE OF THE CHRISTIAN WIFE AND MOTHER, IN HER DISTINGUISHING TRAITS OF CHARACTER; THE EXTENT AND VALUE OF HER INFLUENCE; AND IN HER RICH AND LASTING REWARD.

Let me first present to you the character itself. This is but feebly expressed in our language by the words, *A virtuous woman*, or even by the more lengthy phrase, *A woman that feareth the Lord*. The words so rendered in the first instance, imply more than those used here; something bordering upon strength and courage, combined with a good disposition and a pure life. It is the simplicity and purity of a saintly soul, which dares to be true to God's purposes in life's ordinary duties, where God has placed woman, and where he crowns her as the helper or "help meet" for man.

As respects the rarity of this character, whatever may have been true of Israel in the days of Solomon, such characters were not wanting to it in its earlier or later history. The ever memorable names of the princely Sarah, the fair Rebekah, of Jociebed and Deborah, of Naomi, Ruth and Esther, will recall to us characters of surpassing loveliness and of true devotion. So, also, those of Mary and Salome, Lydia and Dorcas. Nor are such characters altogether rare in our day. The influence of God's word, the example of our Saviour, and the power of the Holy Spirit, have wrought out many such characters, and given them as a priceless legacy to a sinful world.

Woman may possess the finest intellectual qualities without religion. She may be gifted with symmetry of feature and beauty of person, grace of manner and gentleness of spirit, and characterized by the most ardent affection, the most heroic devotion and self-denial, and yet lack the most subtle and most potent of all charms, one which unites all others and blends them in a perfect character. Being deficient in this, the deficiency is nowhere so apparent as in the higher and more endearing relations of wife and mother. It is this charm of piety, the grace of saintliness, joined with and hallowing the others, that forms "the virtuous woman" here described.

Let us now, in detail, look at the beautiful traits of the ideal here given.

And, first, that which is first named: The basis in her character for an entire confidence as respects her conjugal fidelity and wise economy. *The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil*. Of all husbands this is not true. Many are ruined financially by the unbounded extravagance and vain ambition of wives. Others, perhaps a still larger number, are more fearfully ruined in moral character, by that devotion to the world, that vain and incurable ambition for fashionable life, for costly furniture and equipage, luxurious viands, and a wardrobe suited to princes; and which ambition to gratify, compels the husband to the torture of unceasing work, to a disregard of divine law, to unjust methods of gain, to unscrupulous bargains, to large and perilous ventures, to the desperate shifts of political life, with its corruption through bribery and frauds on government—perhaps, eventually, to the gaming table and the stimulating and stupifying bowl.

The industries of the world are beautiful to contemplate—the rolling wheels, the flying ships, the midnight shuttle, the deep thought, the toilful studies—if we view them as ministering to the happiness of homes, in the diffusion of the sweet charities of life, and as preparing a world for immortality; but they are horrible to be thought of, as the exponents of torturing

toil, struggling in the race of ambition for display, to reach a final goal in hell.

I would not be understood as saying that vain and sinful ambition and love of display are found only in woman, or in woman destitute of religion. This is not true. But this I affirm, that the virtuous woman, as here described, would not place temptations of this kind in the path of husband or of sons. The rather, she would exercise restraints and virtuous impulses; would insure a higher aim; would inspire the mind with the sentiments and affections appropriate to a nobler and a holy life. Her sense of honor and propriety would influence his mind, and her purer ambition would moderate and control his own. In these respects, and in all matters pertaining to a cheerful and wise economy in domestic life, the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. It is one of the beautiful traits in the character here delineated, that there is this basis in it for entire confidence in all matters of social and domestic life.

It is another trait in the character here so delicately sketched, that this virtuous woman is beneficent. *The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.*

It is sometimes the case, in this sad world, that we see those in the conjugal relation deficient alike in a sense of duty and in beneficent aim. A "help meet" for man? Nay! Their ambition is to be an idol or a toy!—to be ministered unto, to be provided for, to be gratified and pleased! Others are satisfied to minister to the pleasure of a husband or to his comfort, little caring for ulterior interests, if they may enjoy the present. In this respect there is a nobler ambition, a dearer and a profounder love in a truly pious wife. She would feel that the unity of the conjugal relation would be sadly marred, as indeed it would be, if she did not, by instinct and affection, promote the best interests of her husband, both spiritual and temporal. This she will cheerfully do, by such co-operative industries as the customs of society will warrant, and as her holy religion enjoins. As in the days when this book was written, the wives of princes and of emperors, equally with those of the common people, held in royal hands the spindle and the distaff; so the virtuous woman is here delineated as diligent and industrious, as prudent and enterprising, in assiduous toil promoting the best interest of family and home.

It is particularly noticed that she is self-denying in her beneficence; rising early, retiring late; and, if necessity is laid upon them through sickness and suffering, *her candle goeth not out by night.*

But these secular engagements do not exhaust the beneficence of the true wife, especially if her husband is not a child of God. She will then feel that the work of securing his salvation is laid upon her; and that hers is an imperfect love if it does not seek their re-union in a better world. Accordingly she will seek to "do him good" by a consistent example, by secret prayer, and by open effort. When he is toiling, when he is at rest, when he is absent, when he is at home, she will often visit the throne above in his behalf, in earnest, tearful supplication. How noble and how arduous this work! And withal how unjust that it should be put upon her! Made to be dependent, trained to dependence, how difficult will she find it to lead from sin's ways to God one whom, by God's command, she must revere as well as love; to guide by counsel and by prayer, one who should be her counselor and helper, and who in her behalf should pray. Doing this work through life; not always appreciated in it—sometimes not even till death. But then, yes then!—when the loss of one's most beneficent friend comes home to the heart, its gushing complaint will be—not always in the words of holy writ—"Wo is me, my taber-

nacle is spoiled and all my cords are broken, there is none to stretch forth my tent any more or to set up my curtains;" (Jer. x. 20;) but "lover and friend hast thou put far away from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." "Who now will care for my soul or guide these children through life's ensnaring paths to heaven." It is a true delineation of the love of the virtuous woman to her husband, that whatever be its trial, it is unchangingly beneficent. "She will do him good and not evil all the days of his life."

In like manner she is beneficent to her household, *looking well to their ways*, providing for them against the severities of the cold and storm, by her own personal exertions. *She makes herself coverings of tapestry; all her household are clothed with scarlet, (double garments.)*

She is also considerate of the poor, and stretcheth out her hands to them; yea, *she stretcheth forth her hands to the needy.* Her industry and wise economy are not in exercise through parsimony, or for the sake of gain, but that she may have to give to the poor and needy.

Through this beneficence, far reaching and comprehending many, encouraging to virtue, it is written "strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."

Again. It is a distinctive trait in the character here sketched, that the virtuous woman contributes to the honor, respect, and influence of her husband.

There is no reference, doubtless, to such cases as those in which a husband, fallen from respectability, is tolerated from regard to the devotion and attachment of the wife; but to other influence not so generally appreciated: viz., that by which the high aims, the purity, and beneficence of the wife, are successful in imparting a higher ambition and a nobler aim to her companion; winning him from evil ways and encouraging in virtue. Not only are many saved from temporal and eternal ruin by the influence of this nearest and best friend, but in times of ordinary trial there are those who would sink in despondency, if they were not buoyed up by the more hopeful and elastic mind of a companion.

It is a familiar proverb, "that a man is known by the company he keeps." This often finds its happiest illustration in the domestic circle. Not a few owe their successes, their elevation, and their real prosperity to the restraining, conserving, and purifying influence, the sustaining conversation and example, of a judicious "friend at home." And if this is true in respect to one's career in time, it is equally true of prospects in the eternal world. The awful problem which Paul suggests to the mind, "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband," has often stimulated the weary soul to new devotion and more fervent prayer, till that salvation has been achieved.

It is in the power of every woman to contribute to the honor, respect, and influence of her husband, and therefore divine Justice worthily notes this among the things achieved by the good wife.

Such are some of the traits in the character of the virtuous woman. Were I now, agreeably to my purpose, to speak of the extent and value of her influence, how should I estimate them? By what interests in time, by what in eternity? And how must I needs traverse all christian lands to spread before you the multiplied examples! And yet, is it not due to the young, in the formation of their characters, that I should do this? Is it not due to parents, in the

training of their daughters; to sons, for their estimate of true worth, that we pause to consider the value of such a gift of God to human society;—of that grace celestial which enriches and crowns the character of the virtuous woman? What are wealth or beauty in comparison of it? The former cannot be the possession of all, however convenient and useful it might be. The latter, however much admired and extolled, adds nothing to present happiness or to future safety, while often it covers and augments the deformity of a worthless mind, and must one day fade and waste in the dust and ashes of the tomb. But the grace of character here commended at once enriches and adorns. It clothes with influence for good and saves innumerable souls. Its power is swayed in the youthful wife, in the wife matured, and in the aged woman. Even after death it holds its scepter still, and lives and reigns in human souls. But I pass from the consideration of this wide and effective influence to consider,—

The Virtuous Woman in her Reward.

It has pleased God to delineate such one as reaping the rewards of virtue. Is she a wife? She secures the confidence of her husband, she enriches and gladdens her home with the fruits of successful enterprise, by frugality and economy, by contentment and christian devotion. Nourishing food, ample and comfortable clothing, are her portion; the blessing of health and the benedictions of the poor. She needs no herald's tongue to speak her fame, for *her own works praise her*. And, says the scripture, "she shall rejoice in time to come." A great and beneficent Creator, in the operation of unerring law, is preparing for her an appropriate reward. Let no anxious eye attempt to peer into it before its time, to discover what and how great it is. It is among the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. It will come in its day. It may be the reward of a family among the saved. It may be the bright memorial of those who turn many to righteousness. We cannot know. But this we know, that even now such have the promise of God, "I will not leave thee." "I will make all his bed in his sickness." "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Going out of life, calm and gentle, at the call of her sovereign Lord, it shall be said, "Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excelest them all."

I have thus endeavored to set before you, from this fair picture, some of the distinguishing features in the character of the virtuous woman:—the basis in her character for an entire and cordial confidence; her true beneficence: her influence in securing honor, respect, and success for her husband; the extent and value of her influence; and, finally, the great and rich reward.

You will agree with me, I trust, that the character here delineated is not the growth and product of a day, nor always, indeed, of a single generation. It is usually the off-shoot of ancestral piety, like the faith of Timothy, which bore the impress of a mother's mother's confidence in God. The first feeble germ of its development is the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. Its next advance is a departure from evil, which is understanding. But let me not give to man the glory of it. The distant and hidden spring that feeds this fountain of supernal excellence has its origin far hence in the love of God. The channel of its grace is through the self-denial and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary,—through the heroism and self-devotion of God's people in all ages, who have left the example of their piety to refresh and cheer and bless the world.

As respects the character here described, let me ask of every woman that

shall consider it, are you willing to live without it? You will need it to sustain you in trial; to support you in adversity; to comfort you in affliction. What will you do without it when you are about to die? Which will you choose in deciding your future; the death of the gay, the thoughtless, and the pleasure loving—the wretched!—that death, with its horrors, its tears, its disappointment, its despair; or the calm and peaceful departure of one who goes leaning upon the Lord whom she has revered and served—into the dark valley—through the deep waters? The decision of to-day may control the issues of the future. Can you fail to see that the character of the virtuous woman is commended of God, commended of men; at once the most desirable in life and even enviable in death. In what respect soever its value is computed, its price is far above rubies, its worth is untold and incomparable.

With this fair ideal of a useful, wise, and saintly character, commended and approved of God, how inexcusable and criminal in parents not to have it always before them in the training of their daughters. How many false notions would it correct; how many pernicious examples would it neutralize; how many perilous maxims explode! To what useful results might it lead in time and in eternity. How much it might save them of sorrow on earth and of disappointment beyond the grave.

Contrast, in your mind, the descent of a wife or daughter to the grave, with this heavenly approval of her earthly career resting like a benediction on her, and perfuming the sepulcher where she lies; and one going out of life suddenly, from the rounds of folly and vain amusement, with all her sins upon her; laden with accomplishments rather than with virtues; beguiling herself and others till the last, and then leaving all good behind with no assurance that she shall rejoice in time to come.

I have given you the details of this character, not merely to be admired as a charming picture appealing to the mind, but as a standard of comparison in the just estimation of human virtues; and as a model for imitation; I may add, also, to excite our gratitude to God for the many virtues of the living and for the blessed memories of the dead. This character, not found beyond the pale of Christianity, may serve to remind us what substantial virtues true religion brings; and how much prosperity in worldly things and the comforts of daily life result from its diffusion; and how great and manifold and solemn are our obligations with reference to its maintenance and support. Such characters, formed under the operations of the spirit of God, are developed and perfected only by attendance at the sanctuary, at the house of prayer, at the place of secret devotions.

To-day let us gratefully remember anew how justly we are indebted to God for the security of virtuous homes, and for the purest domestic enjoyments. Let us not forget that we owe these blessings to Jesus Christ and to his benevolent institutions. And let us remember that these items all enter into the considerations which should lead us to honor, love, and serve him, and to do this sincerely and heartily, beginning this day; and that these are but a part of innumerable blessings for which we must one day give an account to God. How gratefully given, if we go from a life of love, duty, and devotion to his bar! How sorrowfully, if in that day we be found perverse and wicked, having received God's mercies, and yet rebelled against him! And how can this be so well avoided as by giving this day our hearts to him? How can we all so well repay him for his love in the blessings of our homes, as by devotion to his service?



